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Rock record sales capricious

Let's face it—Quebec has strange taste

By BILL MANN
for The Gazette

Being a record retailer in Quebec often seems to be about as stable as playing the Mino Loto for a living.

"Strange, strange tastes," the way the manager of one large local record store described his clientele. "You never know what's going to be next," he added. "In the United States and England, it's much easier — you read the trade papers like Billboard and order what's popular. But not here—so MANY things are popular."

So that's one of the intrigues about existing in a cultural potpourri such as Montreal: pop groups almost unheard of in their own home countries can be overnight stars in Montreal and Quebec.

Examples? There are many.

Probably the best is Shawn Phillips, singer-songwriter of marginal international following and ex-protege of Donovan who has such a rabid fandom in Quebec that he might well sell out 30 dates a year here if he were so inclined to play them. His albums, on A&M Records, have sold a staggering 150,000 copies here, one AM spokesman report. One of his albums, Second Contribution, is already over 50,000 copies sold in Quebec. 150,000 records is well over one-half the number needed for a gold album in the big U.S. market. 50,000 copies of one album is more than enough to qualify for a Canadian gold record.

LOCAL FLUKE

Another local fluke success story is that of Babe Ruth, a group with only a moderate following in their home country of England but with more fans locally than they know what to do with. Their first LP, First Base, sold a reported 30,000 copies in Quebec, Capitol Records claims, and the album was on The Gazette's Top 10 best-seller chart for a year.

Then there are English rock groups like Genesis (over 30,000 records sold) and Gentle Giant (over 30,000) who have followings locally 'way out of proportion with their worldwide sales figures. One promotion man surmises the reason: "Any group with a European and classical sound usually does well here.

Freak occurrences also happen with pop singles. The best example may be a 45 called "Woman," by an obscure group out of Spain called Barrabas that sold a reported 80,000 copies-plus in Quebec two years ago; the song received virtually no airplay anywhere else in North America.

Elvis Presley, according to a spokesman at RCA Records-Canada, sells four times more records in Quebec than in the other nine provinces combined. "Elvis is still very hot here," says the RCA man.

Then there are the electronic-rock groups from Europe like Phaedra who surface here but rarely any place else on this continent. The latest is a German electronics group, Kraftwerk, who are called Autobahn.

Other artists unusually popular in Quebec include: Greek composer-singer Demis Roussos; Greek chanteuse Nana Mouskouri, whose sales are the highest here in North America; and Muzak-oriented artist Roger Whittaker, whose version of Mammy Blue was a huge hit in Quebec and practically nowhere else in 1972.

The latest local phenom has been British rock band Supertramp (who perform at the U of M this weekend). They have sold a quick 10,000 albums in Quebec, an unusually high total for a new, unknown act. The unusual market is also an excellent launching point for groups trying to gain a foothold in North America: the Moody Blues and Pink Floyd, to name just two, were popular here long before most North Americans had ever heard of them.

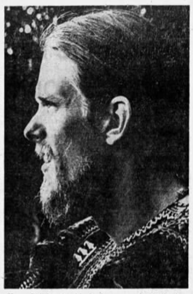
To turn the coin over, there are other artists who do well elsewhere on the continent in sales who, for one reason or another (the main being, of course, language), don't sell comparably well in Quebec.

WEAK CANADIANS

A survey of record companies in Montreal lists among them U.S. comedian George Carlin (whose records "go gold" in the U.S. and the rest of Canada); Bob Dylan, the songwriter of a generation (he sells here, but not nearly as well as elsewhere); teenage faves The Osmond Brothers (this being one of the few major cities in North America in which they haven't done a concert); folksinger Loudon Wainwright III, who sells only a trickle of records locally; dope-culture comics Cheech and Chong, who recorded an album here last year in relative anonymity; and most Canadian folk artists, who, one record man says, "Are so weak here you can't give their records away. People like Bruce Cockburn and Valdy."

And, of course, there are Quebec artists unheard of virtually nowhere else besides France, who sell tons of records: one recent example would be chanteuse Renée Martel, whose J'Ai Un Amour Qui Ne Veut Pas Mourir moved 100,000-plus copies recently.

But the incredible story of the self-sufficient local recording industry has been told many times before. What is just as interesting are the non-Quebeckers who prosper through capricious sales here.



Shawn Phillips: Outside Quebec, a marginal following

Wet Willie: Outfunking everything else they've done

Rock & Pop

Status Quo vadis? Straight to the top

By BILL MANN
for The Gazette

On the Level, Status Quo (Capitol); On Your Feet Or On Your Knees, Blue Oyster Cult (Columbia).

Quick-quiz time: what's the No. 1 album in England currently? Clue: it's a hard rocker . . . Led Zeppelin's latest, right? No way! Try Status Quo's On the Level, and if for some reason you still believe Led Zeppelin is the hardest of the British hard-rock bands, you've got another guess coming, because, these days, Quo makes Jimmy Page & Co. sound like a bunch of strolling violinists.

Status Quo may know only about three power chords, but that's OK, because they never pretended to be anything except sonic shock troops, and their first LP on Capitol is a good bet to break them big in North America — and they deserve to be as popular here as they are back home in England. They are a relentless, flat-out hell-bound band with one of the best stage shows anywhere. After hearing this, you'll probably never buy another BTO album. Down, Down (a 45) is one of those songs that threatens to blow out your speakers from the first note. Hard-core rockers have no business being without this.

The ominous-sounding BO Cult, on the other hand, are the undisputed heavyweight champs of North America, and this live LP is one of the few double albums that deserve to go beyond two sides. These guys are not only superb rock musicians, they are also very clever, if you can hear the lyrics over the ground-zero sound. They come on like a brain blitzkrieg from Note 1 and, by the time they've hit their peak on Side III, you've either bailed out long ago or are firmly wired into this musical methedrine highball into oblivion.

ME 262, off their fine Secret Treaties LP, is a classic of the future-android rock genre, as is Cities Aflame (With Rock and Roll); the former, a 45 with lyrics by rock writer madman Richard Meltzer, one of the funniest men alive, is all about Hitler becoming a rock star. Best line about Adolph is "He lived . . . that we might die." The title of the album is my nomination for best of the year, and if you haven't discovered the beserk Buck Dharma yet, then you really don't fully know what "electric guitar" means. Put ME-262 on your car stereo and I **dare** you to keep the speedometer under the approach speed to Dorval Airport. We're all heading for the edge pretty fast and, who knows, this just might be the album to put you over! (Not recommended for Allman Brothers or casual rock fans, incidentally). Parental discretion advised: if you've got any around, get them out of the house before you put this on! Don't call yourself a rock and roller if you don't own both of these LP's. **A-minus (both).**

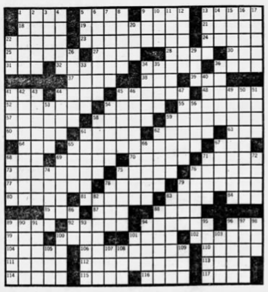
Now, at the other extreme of the rock spectrum, we have something called "country-rock":

Dixie Rock, Wet Willie (Capricorn Records).

We all remember Wet Willie's great 45, Keep On Smilin', on their last elpee, but if you've been following these crackers as far back as I have, you'll know that they've always been one of the funkiest bands around. But this new LP outfunks anything they and just about anyone else has put on the market in a long time. Remember the great Otis Redding duet/duelette with Carla Thomas on "Tramp" a few years back? Well, check out "Mama Didn't Raise No Fools" here, and see if it doesn't compare favorably. Wet Willie's best LP yet, and they keep on getting stronger. This one's so funky I found dead boll weevils sealed inside by copy. **B-Plus.**

Crossword

Edited by Margaret Farrar
Copr. '75 Los Angeles Times
By H.I. RISTEEN
Solution on Page 35



ACROSS

1 Mining product
5 "Adam —"
9 Panelist Peggy
13 Sudden fancies
18 Roman emperor
19 Conveyances for Hannibal: Lat.
21 Asian capital
22 San —, Calif.
24 Cutthroat: Phrase
25 African antelope
26 In time: Music
27 Quarry
28 Marcel Marceau
30 Born
31 Carlie Chaplin's title
32 Pebbles, rocks
34 Young animals
36 Cliques
37 Rapid rodent
38 Grampus
39 Old saying
41 Felt shoe
44 Animal abodes
45 Arboreal animals
48 Strike again
52 Kennedy or DeGaulle
54 European Lindens
55 "Keeping the wolf from —"
57 Court events
58 Starchy plants
59 White wine
60 Be aware of
61 "— Love Song"
62 Lave
63 Family member, for short
64 Picnic drink
65 Sharp blow
67 Beverage for two
68 NNE's opp.
69 Vinous: Var.
70 Female water buffalo
71 Singed
73 Certain British schoolboys
75 Widgeons
76 Traduce
77 Oval
78 Anatoly Karpov's game
79 Comforts
80 Crusoe creator
81 Ranch assets
83 — Blanc
84 Take tiffin
85 Relative of 63 Across: Abbr.
87 Literary form
88 Channel island
89 What Oliver wanted
92 Goof
94 Confusion
96 Weather outlook
100 Unit of measure
99 Turkish weight
101 South American rodent
102 Washington Indian
104 Proportion
106 Semiprecious stone
110 Pack animals
111 Makes the first move
112 Sizeable serpents
113 River into the Baltic
114 Soft and glossy
115 City in Indiana
116 Sawbucks
117 Pecans, for example

DOWN

1 Mexican racoon
2 Furry swimmer
3 Attention getter
4 Complete turns
5 River base
6 Runaways
7 Student's goal
8 Fencing weapons
9 Persian, for one
10 "Man — Superman"
11 Put up with: Slang
12 Seal
13 Exclamation of delight
14 "Prince —"
15 Senseless
16 French painter
17 Positions
20 Equine fare
22 Grad. degrees
26 Yellow pigments
29 Author's pride: Abbr.
33 Blow one's top
34 "Ship of—"
35 Table scraps
36 Man from Malmo
40 Range crest
41 Carroll and O'Brien
42 Daydream structure
43 Gave a false alarm
44 Blockhead
45 Caravansary
46 Circus performer
47 Position
49 Derby
50 Arm of the Mediterranean
51 — bien
53 Window section
54 Feline
56 Lullaby word
58 Lab vessels (with 72 Down)
59 Mathematical ratios
61 Riviera resort
62 Norse writings
62 Inlets
66 Fourth estate
67 Band instrument
68 Sowing item
69 Engine tender
71 Hit hard
72 See 58 Down
74 Daughter of Tantalus
75 Complet
76 Pinocchio transformation
78 Give up
79 Classify
82 Insurance arrangement
83 Southeast Asian language
86 Kimono sash
88 Formally withdraw
89 Philippine Moslems
90 Giraffe's cousin
91 African badger
93 Readily available
94 Didn't exist
95 Spanish man's name
96 Piece of boned fish
97 Hebrew measures
98 Type of stove
100 Nosegay
101 Nosegay
101 Type of athlete, for short
103 Large antelope
105 India —
107 Elongate fish
108 Small field
109 Letter

CJFMusic 95.9

BIZARRE POST-MORTEM SUCCESS: Jimi Hendrix just-released album, "Crash Landing", ought to be a monster — judging by the incredible product popularity of other deceased stars. Buddy Holly had four solo hits before he died in a plane crash in 1959, seven hits thereafter. Jim Reeves had only two top singles before his 1964 death, 10 in the years after his crash and, on the album side, two before and SEVENTEEN post-humous hits. Hendrix, Joplin, Duane Allman, Gram Parson . . . all of their sales peaked after their deaths. Since the post-mortem releases in most cases had already been judged tertiary material by the artists, the increased sales cannot be attributed to better quality music, but more correctly to the emotional reaction to tragic death.

THE BEAT GOES ON: And here's another "H" album from America, this one called "Hearts". We've added it to our playlists, along with Eric Clapton's "There's One in Every Crowd" (recorded in Jamaica and clearly reggae-tinged), Jimmy Cliff's "The Harder They Come . . . " and Henry Gross' "Plug Me into Something". Gross' "Dixie Spiderman" cut definitely has a hint of the old Stones. Dave Cousins has released a single version of "Grace Darling" titled "Cherie, Je T'Aime" and there's talk this Strawb would like to do an album, a concert and a TV special from Montreal's Notre Dame Cathedral.

NOW HEAR THIS: "Forum Sellouts" wraps up this weekend with Dylan/The Band on Friday (April 4) from eight 'til 10 on CJFM and Saturday, same hours, with Chicago. "The History of British Rock" makes its debut the following week, April 12 at noon . . . Peter Allan joins Mary Travers & Friend this Sunday night at eight and Aeon (formerly of The Haunted and The Rabble) will be Dave Tollington's guest Sunday at nine on 95.9 on "Live Music in Montreal" . . . If you have an ear for different programming, check "The Rock That Never Rolls Sunday mornings from seven to eight on CJFM.

THE VINTAGE MONTH: Rock Talk joins The Star's Juan Rodriguez and The Gazette's Bill Man in applauding last week's April Wine concert at place des Arts — and Donald K., too, for reopening those hallowed halls to our kind of music. See, P de A, no one busted the joint. The toughest crowd to play is a home crowd, but Wine pulled it off and will now head into a stepped-up international campaign with great confidence. Incidentally, their album "Stand Back" (a regular set on CJFM) has been released in the U.S. and has been recommended by Billboard, the trade publication.

THE CONTEST: Ellen Gasol, M. McGowan, Margaret Hollett, John Garmaise and Allan Youster were winners last week, correctly pinning Linda Ronstadt's "It Really Doesn't Matter Anymore" as Canadian content because Paul Anka wrote music and lyrics for Buddy Holly. This week, tell us: What new Top Forty hit was written about John Lennon? Our address, CJFM, Box 959, Station "H", Montreal. 5 winners will receive the last John Lennon album, "Walls and Bridges".

95.9 Rock Talk

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